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A European Culture War in the Twentieth Century? Anticatholicism and Antibolshevism between Moscow, Berlin, and the Vatican 1922 to 1933¹

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In 1981, historian Winfried Becker argued for an interpretation of the German *Kulturkampf* within a European context, as one of many conflicts with the Catholic Church that emerged “in the second half of the nineteenth century, wherever the powerfully interventionist centralized national state joined up in the name of progress with contemporary currents that were partly secularistic and partly directly hostile to religion.”² Not only have comparative and transnational studies integrated the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s into the wider history of anticatholicism,³ the term “culture war” has been liberated from its German origin and is now applied as a generic expression for secular-catholic conflicts across nineteenth-century Europe.⁴ Interpreting the parties to these conflicts as “cultures” corresponds to what can be described as a paradigm shift in the historical study of religion. Rejecting the

¹ Research for this article was begun during a fellowship stay at the Historisches Kolleg in Munich with the financial support of the British Academy and the AHRC. It was presented as a paper in May 2013 to the LMU research group “Religious Cultures in 19th and 20th-century Europe”. I am grateful for comments made there and by the helpful suggestions of Lisa Dittrich, Stephanie Roulin and the anonymous reviewers of the journal. I would like to thank the directors and archivists of the Vatican archives for their assistance during a research stay: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Segreteria di Stato.

² W. Becker, “Der Kulturkampf als Europäisches und deutsches Phänomen,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 101 (1981): 444.

³ M. Borutta, *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); L. Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus als europäisches Phänomen: Protest und Öffentlichkeit in Frankreich, Spanien und Deutschland (1850-1914)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming); A. Joskowicz, *The Modernity of Others: Jewish Anti-Catholicism in Germany and France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2014).

⁴ C. Clark and W. Kaiser, *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003);

teleological implications inherent in theories of secularization or modernization, recent studies have revealed how conflicts between liberalism and ultramontanist overlapped with existing confessional antagonisms and contributed to the formation of modern party systems and socio-political milieus.⁵ Intellectual and cultural historians have discovered in anticatholicism a discourse and practice through which liberal ideas of subjectivity, sociability, and nation were constructed.⁶

Most studies of the transnational culture wars, like the other essays in this special issue, break off prior to the First World War. Yet, if measured by acts of violence, anticlericalism peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, when thousands of Catholic priests and believers were imprisoned or executed and hundreds of churches razed in Mexico, Spain and Russia. While the historical literature on anticlericalism in these three countries continues to grow,⁷ there has been little effort to develop a wider theoretical

⁵ O. Blaschke, "Das 19. Jahrhundert: Ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter?," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000): 38–75; H.-G. Haupt and D. Langewiesche, eds., *Nation und Religion in Europa: Mehrkonfessionelle Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2004).

⁶ While studies of predominantly Protestant countries have tended to portray Catholics as victims of a hegemonic liberalism, studies of predominantly Catholic countries have generally viewed anti-Catholicism within the context of a battle for political control between powerful Catholic forces and their liberal and subaltern opponents. For the former approach: R. Healy, "Anti-Jesuitism in Imperial Germany: The Jesuit as Androgyne," in *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800-1914*, ed. H. W. Smith (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001), 153–181; M. Gross, *The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); T. Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism; France and the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Borutta, *Antikatholizismus*; Studies that see the conflict as one of reciprocal influence: Julio de la Cueva and Feliciano Montero, eds., *La secularización conflictiva: España (1898 - 1931)* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007); Guido Verucci, *L'Italia laica prima e dopo l'Unità* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1996).

⁷ Three recent examples: M. Butler, ed., *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*; (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Cueva and Montero, *La secularización conflictiva*; D. Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998).

and transnational framework, such as has emerged around the study of the nineteenth century culture wars.⁸

Why have investigations of anticatholicism's role in the formation of political culture generally not extended into the twentieth century, except in the Spanish case?⁹ The most obvious answer is that the *Kulturkampf* had simply abated. Historian Martin Conway names several developments in interwar Europe that point in this direction, among others, the inclusion of centrist Christian parties in pluralistic democracies, the weakening of confessional divisions, and the retreat of liberals and social democrats from anticlericalism. Conway considers anticlerical violence to have been a largely marginal phenomenon, limited to Spain or located outside of Western Europe. Thus he suggests that the Vatican's fears of radical secularism, expressed in numerous encyclicals, was a misreading of a largely benevolent postwar environment that stemmed either from the residual trauma of the nineteenth-century culture wars or the desire to round up the flock.¹⁰ Yet, this depiction fails to convince. For, while it is true that many liberals in France, Germany, and Italy found anticatholicism less appealing after the First World War, anticlericalism increasingly became a tactic embraced by political extremists, particularly, but not exclusively, on the left. In the public sphere, the actions of these groups became linked to the news of atrocities in Mexico, Russia and Spain, thereby raising the stakes of local politics. Even where anticlericalism did not lead to physical violence, rhetorical violence was common in press, pulpit, association, and street demonstration, i.e. in the realm of culture broadly defined.

The term "culture war" can be usefully applied to the 1920s and 1930s not in order to make an argument about continuity, but rather to benefit from some of the methodological innovations that have recently taken place in the study of nineteenth-

⁸ Although it focuses on physical violence in civil wars and does not look at culture more broadly, a useful starting point is provided by J. de la Cueva Merino, "El asalto de los cielos: una perspectiva comparada para la violencia anticlerical española de 1936" *Ayer* 88/2012 (4): 51-74.

⁹ A collaborative research project is underway at the University of Alcalá: "Catholicism and Secularization in 20th Century Spain."

¹⁰ M. Conway, "The Christian Churches and Politics in Europe, 1914–1939," in *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 9, ed. H. McLeod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 151-178, esp. 169–72.

century anticatholicism. In particular, it can pose new questions to the growing literature on religion's relationship to the political ideologies of the age of extremes.¹¹ Numerous studies now exist that link the interwar experiences of political Catholicism to the later emergence of Christian Democracy,¹² and many more have examined church accommodation with fascism.¹³ Yet we have not yet seen a study of the churches' engagement with secularism comparable to church historian Hubert Wolf's account of the Vatican's theological encounter with National Socialist racism.¹⁴ The title of Wolf's book *Pope and Devil* evokes the Faustian elements of the relationship, but it is somewhat anachronistic, given that when Christian leaders spoke of the devil or the Antichrist in the 1930s, they most often identified him not with Hitler, but with "godless Bolshevism." A comparison of the paired encyclicals of March 1937 *Mit brennender Sorge* and *Divini Redemptoris* demonstrates that when confronted with Soviet atheism, the Vatican considered Nazism the lesser evil.¹⁵ It may be that Christian

¹¹ I. Kershaw, "Europe's Second Thirty Years War," *History Today* 55, no. 9 (2005): 10–17; S.

Payne, *Civil War in Europe: 1905 - 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

¹² J. Boyer, "Catholics, Christians, and the Challenges of Democracy: The Heritage of the Nineteenth Century," in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918-1945*, ed. W. Kaiser and H. Wonnout (Routledge, 2004), 7–45; G.-R. Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology 1924-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); S. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996).

¹³ G. Besier and F. Piombo, *The Holy See and Hitler's Germany*, trans. W. Ward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); R. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

¹⁴ H. Wolf, *Pope and Devil: The Vatican's Archives and the Third Reich*, trans. K. Kronenberg (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ This is the thesis of T. Schulze, "Antikommunismus als politischer Leitfaden des Vatikans? Affinitäten und Konflikte zwischen Heiligem Stuhl und NS-Regime im Jahr 1933," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 60, no. 3 (2012): 353–379. Other studies that draw attention to Christian antibolshevism in Germany include H. Smolinsky, "Das katholische Rußlandbild in Deutschland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg und im 'Dritten Reich'," in *Das Rußlandbild im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994), 323–355; S. Ummenhofer, *Wie Feuer und Wasser? Katholizismus und Sozialdemokratie in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: WVB, 2003); K. Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche und Weimarer Republik: zum politischen Weg des deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1918 und 1932* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1981).

anticommunism appears so obvious in retrospect that scholars have not considered it worthy of further investigation.¹⁶ Given, however, that nineteenth-century liberalism and ultramontanistism first produced their full articulation through their interaction, then interwar Christian antibolshevism should not be taken for granted, but rather studied in its evolving relationship to communist anticlericalism.

This essay sketches out what such an approach might contribute to our understanding of the interwar period by taking a contested zone in the struggle between the Vatican and the Soviet Union as a case study: Germany. The focus on the encounter of transnational anticatholicism with Catholic antibolshevism means that a full account of the interwar *Kulturkampf* in Germany will not be attempted. Other key actors, be they Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Jews, socialists, liberals, or National Socialists, appear only as contextual factors in the essay.

The time segment under consideration begins with the pontificate of Pius XI in 1922 and ends with Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933. As will become apparent, Catholic leaders in the Vatican and Germany did register other sources of anticatholicism in this period, namely in Mexico, where between 1926 and 1929 the anticlerical government fought to suppress the Catholic Cristero Rebellion, and in Spain, where the Republican government declared a radical separation of church and state in 1931. However, it was principally through the Russian Revolution and its antireligious campaigns that Catholic leaders interpreted radical secularism elsewhere, such that, as historian Emma Fattorini put it, "anti-clericalism of heterodox origins was put down entirely to a sort of meta-historical force of communism."¹⁷

Existing histories of the relations between the Holy See and the Soviet Union have incorporated Germany largely in its role as a diplomatic mediator.¹⁸ This essay instead

¹⁶ Emma Fattorini writes that "While the [encyclical] condemning communism is stronger, given that there is no possibility of its redemption, it is more doctrinal, less ringing and biblical, than that against the twisted cross that had been erected in place of the cross of Christ." E. Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican: Pope Pius XI and the Speech That Was Never Made* (Cambridge [u.a.]: Polity Press, 2011), 9.

¹⁷ Fattorini, 101.

¹⁸ H. Stehle, *Geheimdiplomatie im Vatikan: Die Päpste und die Kommunisten* (Zürich: Benziger, 1993); P. Chenaux, *L'Église Catholique et le Communisme en Europe (1917 - 1989) de Lénine À Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 2009); L. Pettinaroli, "La politique russe du Saint-Siège (1905-

moves below the level of diplomacy to uncover the social and religious repercussions of the *Kulturkampf* within the German Catholic Church and the German political system and then to examine how these in turn fed back into the transnational struggle. The essay shows how the dynamic relationships in the triangle Soviet Union-Vatican-Germany changed with the transition between the two phases of the Catholic-communist interaction. During the 1920s, Moscow and the Holy See engaged in diplomatic efforts to find a *modus vivendi*. They used their direct connections to the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Catholic Center Party to bring the German government to back their diplomatic strategies and tempered or called forth anticatholicism and anticommunism to sway public opinion. After the definitive break in relations and the launching of the pope's "crusade of prayer" in 1930, Germany shifted from being the main conduit of diplomacy to a chief battleground in a bitter transnational propaganda war between communists and Catholics. Here the essay focuses on the ways in which the *Kulturkampf* fed into domestic political and confessional struggles, enabling German politicians to harness its religious-political vocabulary to their own agendas. It shaped the political options open to supporters of the liberal state during the deepening German political crisis between 1930 and 1933.

The chief source base for this essay is material from Vatican and German state and ecclesiastical archives. Only a handful of German-language documents from the archive of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow have been consulted. The result is a view of the *Kulturkampf* largely from the perspective of a handful of Vatican decision makers and their German correspondents, which shows how anticatholicism was registered by the leading Catholics of the day, and how they responded with antibolshevik messages expressed in different spheres to specific target audiences.

***Kulturkampf* in the triangle Rome-Moscow-Berlin**

When Lenin's followers formed the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in Brussels in 1903, they already stood in an entangled history with the Catholic Church. Popes Pius XI and Leo XIII had issued numerous encyclicals condemning socialism and communism and the exiled Russians had imbibed the

1939)" (PhD, Lyon 2, 2008); M. Levant, "Reconqu rir le Reich? Le Vatican et l'Allemagne de Weimar, des nonciatures Pacelli au Reichskonkordat (1919-1934)" (PhD, Univ. de Bretagne Occidentale, 2012).

anticatholic literature popular among the European workers' movement. Some Bolsheviks, such as novelist Maxim Gorky and future Commissar of the Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, actively promoted the intellectual philosophies of Western Freethought, from the monism of Ernst Haeckel and Ernst Mach to the positivism of Auguste Comte.¹⁹

In the course of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, Metropolitan Tikhon of the Orthodox Church anathematized the Bolshevik government, which, for its part, targeted churches and church leaders for violent suppression. Leading Vatican figures had direct traumatic experiences of revolution. As nuncio in Warsaw, Achille Ratti (later Pius XI 1922-1939) contemplated possible martyrdom as the advancing Red Army threatened to overrun the city in 1920, while the nuncio to Bavaria, Eugenio Pacelli (later Pius XII 1939-1958), fled Munich to escape the short-lived revolution there in 1919.²⁰

Despite mutual hostility, the Vatican and Moscow each had reasons for coming to an understanding. Vatican diplomacy was guided by two major considerations. First, it sought to secure pastoral access and care for an estimated 2,200,000 million Catholics and 65,000 practitioners of the "Eastern rites" living under Soviet domination.²¹ Second, it sought to make the most of the crippling blow inflicted by the Bolsheviks on the Russian Orthodox Church. Pius XI hoped to overcome the schism of 1054, not through the union of the churches desired by many Orthodox believers, but rather through the conversion to Catholicism of the Russians living in the USSR and in exile.²²

The pursuit of these aims opened the Vatican to charges of opportunism. In 1924 the left-wing journal *Die Weltbühne* accused the Holy See of remaining silent to the shooting of priests, due to its "enormous interest in not losing the connection with the Russian rulers."²³ Without entirely embracing this cynical view, one can nonetheless

¹⁹ I. Polianski, "Between Hegel and Haeckel : Monistic Worldview, Marxist Philosophy and Biomedicine in Russia and the Soviet Union," in *Monism: Science, Philosophy, Religion, and the History of a Worldview*, ed. T. Weir (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 197–222.

²⁰ Pettinaroli, 834.

²¹ Estimates found in: Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari (AA.EE.SS.), Russia, pos. 626, fasc. 13-18.

²² For a damning evaluation of Vatican policy: L. Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny SJ and Russia; a Pre-ecumenical Approach to Christian Unity* (Würzburg: Augustinus, 1990); and for more sympathetic account of the "le mirage russe": Chenaux, 57-83.

²³ "Der weisse und der gelbe Papst," *Weltbühne* vol. 20, no. 17, April 24, 1924, 529-533.

conclude that like other aspects of the postwar order, the Russian Revolution provided opportunities as well as threats to the Catholic Church.

The Soviet Union, for its part, entered into negotiations with the Vatican out of its desire for diplomatic recognition and in order to smooth relations with those states with large Catholic populations. Avoiding making an enemy as powerful as the Vatican may have played some role in the uneven treatment of the religions of Russia. According to a Vatican report citing information obtained from the antireligious museum in Leningrad, some 54% of Orthodox churches, but only 6.8% of Roman Catholic churches had been closed by 1927 or 1928.²⁴

Germany emerged as the chief diplomatic channel for Soviet-Vatican negotiations for two reasons. First, the military cooperation between the Red Army and the Reichswehr established at the treaty of Rapallo in 1922 made Germany a key strategic partner for the Soviets. Second, the powerful position of the Catholic Center Party in successive governments, gave the Vatican direct access to leading Catholic politicians of Weimar from former Chancellor Joseph Wirth, to party chairmen Wilhelm Marx and Prelate Ludwig Kaas. As nuncio to Germany until 1929, Eugenio Pacelli became a key go-between in Vatican diplomacy. He received papal direction via Secretary of State Pietro Cardinal Gasparri, but also through Bishop Michel d'Herbigny, a French Jesuit, who rose quickly through papal favor to lead the *Commissio pro Russia*, an institute dedicated to the Church's Russian mission.

Soviet religious policy in the 1920s

As historian Daniel Peris and others have shown, Soviet religious policy varied considerably in the 1920s. In the chaotic period following the Civil War, the Bolsheviks had focused on disabling the hierarchy and fomenting a schism within the Russian Orthodox Church. During the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which was marked by efforts to stimulate the economy and win popular support for the new regime, limited private enterprise was reintroduced. In line with overtures being made to the peasantry, some party leaders argued for limited toleration of local church congregations, particularly the growing sects. At the same time, the party supported

²⁴ The Jewish, Lutheran, Muslim and Baptist institutions got off even more lightly than the Catholic Church. Taken from Ludwig Berg's report to Pacelli, Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Archivio Nunziatura Berlino (ANB), no 27, fasc. 10, fol. 1, Nov. 4, 1929.

broad antireligious education, and in 1925 created a nominally voluntary organization, the League of the Godless.²⁵

League policy fluctuated between seeking to combat religion via propaganda and its direct suppression through violence. The decisive swing from a “culturalist” to an “interventionist” mode in 1929 reflected the overall shift in the Bolshevik regime associated with collectivization and the building of socialism.²⁶ Historians have tied this “great turn” to Stalin’s consolidation of power, but also to tensions arising from the contradictions of NEP. Homologous contradictions manifested themselves in the religious sphere. On the one hand, there was mounting demand within the state for antireligious action, which is revealed in the forced growth of the League, now called the *Militant Godless*, from 100,000 members in 1925 to 700,000 in 1929.²⁷ On the other hand, a “religious wave” was sweeping the Soviet Union, which saw the recovery of Orthodox churches and the flourishing of many grass roots cults. Ludwig Berg, the priest in charge of the Vatican mission to Russian émigrés in Berlin, reported that the Ukrainian Orthodox church had succeeded in building a church apparatus qualitatively and quantitatively as good as the government’s antireligious organizations. In the city of Kharkov, the number of church practitioners had risen dramatically from 10,000 in 1925 to 34,000 in 1927.²⁸

Rising tensions 1927-1929

By 1927 diplomacy between the Vatican and Moscow had stalled. Pacelli wrote to d’Herbigny that only the directive of Gasparri to “not rip the tenuous thread” connecting the Vatican to Moscow led him to agree to meet Georgy Chicherin, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, for a second time in 1927. D’Herbigny complimented Pacelli on the sacrifice he made in overcoming the repugnance of having to deal with representatives of a regime that “had stirred up the universal execration of the civilized

²⁵ Peris; A. Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief: The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party 1917 - 1929* (Helsinki: SHS, 1994).

²⁶ D. Peris, “The 1929 Congress of the Godless,” *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 4 (1991): 711.

²⁷ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 118.

²⁸ ASV, ANB 27, fasc. 10, fol. 1-61, Ludwig Berg to Pacelli, Nov. 4, 1929.

world.”²⁹ The previous year, d’Herbigny had undertaken a disastrous mission to Russia. Following his secret consecration as bishop by Pacelli in Berlin, d’Herbigny had consecrated further bishops in Moscow. When this became known to the Soviet authorities, the Jesuit was expelled and increased restrictions placed on Vatican activity inside Russia.³⁰

German Catholic politicians also felt frustrated at having to suppress their growing hatred of the Soviet regime for reasons of state. Center party chairman and prelate Ludwig Kaas told former chancellor Joseph Wirth in 1929, “I could describe the current Russian regime as nothing other than a ‘satanic synagogue’, whose disappearance would be a blessing not just for Russia, but for the whole world.” Here he assumed that “the Catholic Wirth” was of the same opinion as “the Catholic Kaas.” At the same time, as a politician he recognized the need ensure peaceful coexistence with a powerful neighbor. Kaas did not think that a public campaign in Germany would serve either end. Given their “pathological fear of a united Western front,” the Soviets would “doubtlessly view a collective action, even of a purely religious nature, as a political concentration against Russia and react accordingly.” Kaas offered to pick up confidential negotiations with Chicherin on behalf of the Church, for which he sought Pacelli’s permission.³¹

The Vatican used German politicians like Wirth and Kaas to bring the German Foreign Office to advance the Vatican’s agenda. However, like their French, Italian and Polish counterparts, German diplomats were hesitant to do more than raise the issue of religious persecution with the Soviets. As long as the Rapallo Treaty remained a pillar of German foreign policy, the Foreign Office was not willing to publicly condemn this sensitive aspect of Soviet domestic politics.

Where elite connections failed to produce results, the Vatican placed pressure on both the German and Soviet governments by appealing directly to the German Catholic community via the press. Vatican archives contain at least two examples of articles written by officials in d’Herbigny’s *Commissio pro Russia* and planted in German

²⁹ ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 1, fol. 174, Comm. Pro Russia, Voto del Relatore (d’Herbigny) on report of Pacelli.

³⁰ Tretjakewitsch; L. Pettinaroli, “Pio XI e Michel d’Herbigny : Analisi di una Relazione al Vertice della Chiesa alla Luce del Materiale delle Udienze Pontificie (1923-1939),” in *Pius XI : Keywords. International Conference Milan 2009* (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2010), 279–297.

³¹ ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 215: Centoz to Gasparri, April 12, 1929.

Catholic papers. On November 17, 1928 Pacelli reported back to Rome that “thanks to intervention of influential personages” he had succeeded in publishing in *Germania*, the flagship paper of the Center Party, a declaration by “German Catholics” against Soviet religious persecution. The perturbed response of the Foreign Office shows that the article had hit its mark. Franz von Papen, an archconservative member of the Center Party and majority shareholder of *Germania*, reported to Pacelli with some glee that the Foreign Office “repeatedly questioned me regarding the origin of this attack and is obviously not in agreement with its content. I responded to the Foreign Office that this notice, which arrived to us from a confidential source, certainly corresponds to the opinion of the entire Catholic population of Germany and that in the future we intend to represent the interests of the Church against the current policy in a much sharper fashion.”³² The Foreign Office had good reason to suspect Vatican involvement, given that the demands listed in the declaration corresponded closely to those forwarded by the Vatican to the Foreign Office for use in ongoing negotiations. Chicherin later told Wirth that articles in *Germania* had led him to the opinion that the Center Party was turning away from Rapallo, a development that he ultimately laid at the doorstep of the Vatican.³³

The article also sought to embarrass the Soviets and the German Foreign Office by revealing negotiations between them over a loan. Wirth and Pacelli expressed hopes that mounting foreign debt would drive the Soviets to make concessions in the religious sphere.³⁴ Events proved Wirth and Pacelli wrong. Rather than moderating policies, the Soviets tried to surmount the balance of payments crisis by increasing grain exports though forced requisitioning coupled with a drive for collectivization.

The Bolsheviks staged collectivization as a rural revolution that targeted the wealthier peasants, the so-called kulaks, as class enemies. Based on purported crimes, such as non-fulfillment of inflated grain production quotas, Soviet officials descended on villages, performed impromptu show trials, stripped kulaks of their grain and their property, and sent them into exile. Many local populations refused to accept the staging

³² ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 175, Franz von Papen to Pacelli, Nov. 20, 1928.

³³ ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 215: Centoz to Gasparri, April 12, 1929.

³⁴ AA.EE.SS., Russia, pos. 626, fasc. 13-18, 1920-37, fol. 14, Pacelli to Gaspari, May 6, 1927; ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 238, Pacelli to d’Herbigny, 19 July, 1929.

and rose up against the state in civil insurrections, which only confirmed to Bolsheviks that they were indeed locked in a life and death struggle with capitalist enemies.³⁵

The April 1929 decree "on religious associations" created the legal framework for a broad persecution of churches and sects. It declared illegal key elements of religious practice, such as youth instruction and the distribution of literature. It also required local church elders to assume personal responsibility for church upkeep, taxes and insurance, expenses that could--analog to the high quotas for grain--be arbitrarily increased to force individuals into arrears and open them to legal prosecution for an act of hostility to the state. According to historian Sandra Dahlke, the chief aim of the 1929 decree was to destroy religious congregations as sites of "potential opposition to agricultural collectivization."³⁶

The antireligious dynamics generated by the state-driven civil war narrowed any negotiating room previously enjoyed by Soviet diplomats. When in 1924 the Soviet ambassador to Germany Nicolai Krestinski received a list of imprisoned priests that the Vatican wished released, he replied to Pacelli that the church's assumption that these individuals had not committed crimes was based on prejudice. Nonetheless, he offered to intervene on behalf of the Holy See out of "humanitarian concern and sense of justice."³⁷ By contrast, when Maxim Litvinov, the new Commissar for Foreign Affairs, discussed imprisoned priests with German ambassador Herbert von Dirksen in 1930, he did not attempt to argue for the individual guilt, implicitly conceding that they were being arrested merely because they were clergy. When von Dirksen insisted that the German-speaking Catholic population of the Soviet Union was "loyal and fully unpolitical," Litvinov said that he had no hope of surmounting the domestic obstacles that would allow the release of their priests: "Given that the Soviet government has an antireligious orientation, the local authorities would simply not understand if action

³⁵ L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin; Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996); T. Weir, "'Von Schwindel Befallen' – Enthusiasmus, Inszenierung und Chaos im Stalinistischen Aufbau am Beispiel der Kollektivierung der DDR-Landwirtschaft 1952–3,'" in *Rausch und Diktatur*, ed. A. von Klimo and M. Rolf (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2006), 219–238.

³⁶ S. Dahlke, "Einführung," "Über die religiösen Vereinigungen" Beschluß des VCIK und des SNK RSFSR, 8. April 1929 (<http://www.1000dokumente.de/>).

³⁷ ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 146, Krestinski to Pacelli, Dec. 10, 1924.

were taken against the Orthodox Church and its priests, while next door the German Catholic priests were left untouched.”³⁸

The targeting of church leaders proved an effective way of breaking up village solidarity and eliminating local elites. Anticatholicism, as a variation of anti-religious discourse, was mobilized in the staging of rural class war in Catholic regions of the Soviet Union. An example is provided by a series of articles that appeared in the German-language newspaper *Das Deutsche Dorf* on a purported “anti-Soviet kulak group” operating in four German villages of the North Caucasus in 1929 under the direction of Catholic priest Josef Kelsch. Following their arrest by the secret police (GPU), the seventeen “wealthy” ringleaders admitted to a series of “outrageous crimes.” Kelsch was accused of urging parents to keep their children out of the Soviet school, forbidding girls from joining non-Catholic youth groups, and ostracizing those living out of wedlock. These “crimes” seem plausible given the self-understanding of many rural Catholic clergy of the day. However, when the article quotes Kelsch as saying, “I am a principle supporter of the bourgeoisie, because they support religion and faith,” Marxist class jargon was clearly being placed in his mouth in order to justify punishment and, most importantly, to produce a didactic lesson for the readers.³⁹

The journalists and police interrogators who authored this lesson mobilized a host of specifically anticatholic clichés to describe Kelsch. He used “medieval methods” in youth instruction, and acted like a “real Jesuit” against the village poor. Those he considered guilty of sins had to kneel in church “or stand for hours in the church yard lightly clad in the bitter cold with outstretched hand--like Christ on the cross.” The press reports peaked in the bizarre allegation that Kelsch had established a Dominican order for boys and a Jesuit order for villagers to engage in secret anti-Soviet violence.⁴⁰ The final article completed the lesson: “The conclusions that we must take from the Kelsch story are clear: merciless struggle against church and clergy of whatever type.”

When d’Herbigny learned that Kelsch’s brother lived in Bavaria, he wrote to Pacelli that this “might provide a good occasion to move the opinion of German

³⁸ AA.EE.SS., Russia, pos. 664 I, fasc. 62, fol. 4-6, Secret report from German consulate, Dec. 19, 1930.

³⁹ ASV, ASB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 240-242.

⁴⁰ Ibid. The accusation that Kelsch founded “orders” for children in *Antireligiöses Lehrbuch fürs Dorf: Verband der Kämpfenden Gottlosen* (Moscow: Zentralvölkerverlag, 1931), 256.

Catholics a bit.”⁴¹ In November 1929, d’Herbigny commissioned another member of his order to write an article on “the persecution of Christians in Russia,” which the German Jesuit and prominent intellectual Friedrich Muckermann sent out via the Catholic wire service. Muckermann assured Pacelli that he could get it into many German newspapers without its true origin being discovered.⁴² The hard-hitting article announced that the “persecution of the Christians and the struggle against all religion appear to be moving towards their apex.” Not only were Catholic priests disappearing to the concentration camps on the Solovetsky islands in the White Sea where lethal winter conditions mean “certain and rapid death,” the regime was now eliminating church buildings, either through demolition, excessive taxation or their transformation into public spaces. This last tactic often went awry, such as occurred when a Komsomol group took over an orthodox church in the Donetsk region in July 1929. In the ensuing battle with local miners, seven Komsomols and eight believers were killed.⁴³

By the time this article was printed, Pope Pius XI had already told d’Herbigny that he had given up hope for future diplomacy. In December 1929, the two began to plan a high-profile campaign against religious persecution in Russia. This “crusade of prayer” signaled the final shift in Vatican strategy from quiet negotiation to open hostility. Announced in the Pope’s public letter to Cardinal Pompili in February 1930, the “crusade” was initiated in a public mass on St. Peter’s Square on March 19 that drew a crowd of 50,000, including many foreign leaders, such as Ludwig Kaas.⁴⁴

Freethinkers in Central Europe

While the inability to check the systematic persecution of clergy in the Soviet Union was the primary factor behind decision to announce the papal “crusade,” the church was also concerned about communist promotion of anticlericalism internationally, particularly in Germany. Bishop d’Herbigny saw in the recent founding

⁴¹ ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 237, d’Herbigny to Pacelli, July 9, 1929; fol. 243, d’Herbigny to Pacelli, August 10, 1929.

⁴² ASV, ANB 30, fasc. 4, fol. 265-267, 268. This article appeared in *Katholische Korrespondenz* no. 117, Nov. 19, 1929.

⁴³ The Italian foreign office passed a harrowing report on the conditions in the concentration camps to the nuncio on Dec. 31, 1929. AA.EE.SS., Russia, pos. 664 I, fasc. 61, fol. 3-6.

⁴⁴ Pettinaroli, “La politique russe,” 813-819; Tretjakewitsch, 234; Chenaux, 86-87.

of German-language newspapers in the Soviet Union an effort to reach readers in Germany and Austria with antireligious propaganda. The German Ministry of the Interior confirmed a year later that Soviet Godless journals were being sold in Berlin and that antireligious programs in German were being broadcast on the international service of the Moscow trade union radio station.⁴⁵ Such efforts to foment anticlericalism in Germany conformed to the Comintern policy of exporting Soviet practices for emulation by Communist parties worldwide. To a significant degree, however, the Soviets were also responding to the opportunities offered by the ongoing anticlerical activities of Central European Freethinkers.

Whereas the socialist-identified wing of Freethought was only one of many secularist endeavors in Wilhelmine Germany, after the First World War it came to dominate the secularist scene. During the revolution, several Freethinkers, including Adolph Hoffmann, Ernst Däumig, and Max Sievers, rose to political prominence in the Independent Socialist Party (USPD). After pushing the USPD to accept the conditions of the Third International imposed by Lenin, they took key positions in the United Communist Party in 1920 but almost immediately ran afoul of the Comintern and were effectively ousted in 1921. Some rejoined the SPD, like Sievers, who became the chairman of Germany's largest secularist organization, the Association for Freethought and Cremation (VffFF). Although dominated by SPD-members, until the late 1920s German Freethought was proud of being a revolutionary proletarian movement that managed to unite communists, left-wing social democrats, and members of the splinter groups of the radical left.⁴⁶

When communist and socialist Freethinkers from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia met to form an International of Proletarian Freethought (IPF) in the Czech town of Teplice in 1925, the Russians were nowhere to be seen. The Comintern approved communist participation, but when the delegate from the Soviet League of the Godless failed to take his reserved seat at the meeting of the IPF executive in Leipzig in

⁴⁵ Bundesarchiv, R 1501/126171, no. 146, Dec. 18, 1930.

⁴⁶ The standard work on postwar German Freethought is J.-C. Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und organisierte Religionskritik: proletarische Freidenkerverbände in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981). On Däumig, T. Weir, "Between Colonial Violence and Socialist Worldview: The Conversions of Ernst Däumig," *German History* 28, no. 2 (2010): 143 – 166.

December, Czech leaders wrote to the Comintern, complaining that without Russian involvement, the Czech and German communist Freethinkers would not succeed in their plan to gain control of the IPF.⁴⁷

Archival data shows that only with the beginning of the shift in Comintern policy known as the “Third Period” in 1928 did the Russians make a concerted effort to wrest control of the IPF and the national Freethought movements from the Social Democrats, now branded “social fascists.” The VffF was an attractive prize. It had expanded enormously in the course of the 1920s thanks to its cremation insurance policy and by 1928 it had over half a million members, making it one of the wealthiest and largest socialist cultural organizations. German Communist Party (KPD) directives of 1929 and 1930 make clear that one of the aims of increasing the anticlerical activism was to outflank the SPD and draw its more radical adherents to the communist side.⁴⁸ When the KPD failed to take over the VffF, it launched its own Freethought movement. The same process occurred within the IPF. Following the expulsion of the leader of the Czech communist Freethought organization Swaz from the IPF’s executive committee in January 1930, the Czech, German and Austrian Communists formed an International Freethought Faction, which they placed under control of the KPD and the Comintern. At the 1930 IPF congress, they walked out to form their own communist IPF.⁴⁹

Under the influence of the Soviet example, German Freethinkers increasingly shifted their anticlerical agitation from lectures and pamphlets of religious history and popular science to public demonstrations and graphic propaganda with crude caricatures (see fig. 1). Agitprop theater gained in popularity, and the church-leaving campaigns of the Freethinkers were embraced by the KPD, which argued that by withholding church taxes, church-leavers dealt a financial blow to the churches. The number of Germans leaving the churches jumped from some 186,000 in 1929 to

⁴⁷ Russian State Archive, RGASPI, Fond 495, Opis 99, Dela 41, 41-43, 74-76. I would like to thank Daniel Peris for his unpublished paper on the relationship of the Soviet state to the IPF.

⁴⁸ On January 15, 1930, Emelian Yaroslavsky, the head of the Soviet Godless, published an article in *Pravda* calling on communists to attempt to “penetrate all antireligious parties ... to make them useful to proletarian class struggle” and to found “an international antireligious central, that will help all communist parties to lead the growing movement against religion.”

Evangelisches Zentralarchiv, Berlin, 7/ 3569, 105.

⁴⁹ RGASPI, Fond 495, Opis 30, dela 685, 1-185.

roughly 250,000 in 1930. Although Protestants made up the overwhelming majority of those becoming confessionless, Catholic Church leaving increased more sharply in 1930.⁵⁰

Organizing the Culture War

With the breakdown of Soviet-Vatican relations and the removal of diplomatic inhibitions, each side launched enormous propaganda campaigns to foment anticatholic and antibolshevik prejudice and action in their respective spheres of influence. These spheres overlapped geographically in Central Europe, which became a chief battleground in the transnational struggle.

[Insert fig. 1]

Just as Ludwig Kaas had warned the prior year, the communist response to the “crusade of prayer” was to designate the Pope as the spiritual ringleader of the international encirclement of Western powers feared by the Soviet Union. On February 11, the German Communist press service announced: “The Pope wants war against the Soviet Union and whoever knows the organizing effect that the Vatican exercises on all Catholic parties and governments around the globe, will appreciate the inflammatory effect of the papal manifesto.” The Leningrad chapter of the Militant Godless threatened to turn the Vatican into an antireligious museum, in which “the straw puppet of the Pope will be displayed next to the straw puppet of a Siberian shaman, as a monument to a thousand years of error and papish deception.”⁵¹ On the front page of the French communist daily *L’Humanité* former Comintern head Nicolai Bukharin decried the March atonement mass in Rome:

This wild dance of the cannibals of the counterrevolution, these howls of the [...] clerical hyenas that accompany the rattling of sabers, spurs, and censers do not

⁵⁰ 215,160 Protestants and 36,292 Catholics left the churches in 1930. K. Algermissen, “Die Pastorallehren aus der Statistik der Kirchengaustritts- und Freidenkerbewegung der Nachkriegszeit,” *Theol.-prakt. Quartalsschrift* 86, no. 4 (1933): 689.

⁵¹ Translation found in an anonymous letter from Katowice to Faulhaber, March, 22, 1930, Archiv des Erzbistums München und Freising, Cardinal Faulhaber Archive, (hereafter Faulhaber Archive), no. 2013/1, 22-24.

astonish anyone. This is the 'moral' preparation for the offensive against the Soviet Union.⁵²

The Soviet godless journal *Bezbozhnik* contained numerous stories against the Vatican from the spring of 1930 onwards, but in the winter of 1930-1931 images of the Pope come to dominate the covers and full-page posters contained in the magazine. A poster from April 1931 shows how Soviets linked all of their enemies to religion (see fig. 2). Out of an Easter egg appear in succession the "kulak," the "sub-kulak" (a term used to designate small farmers who resisted collectivization), the "wrecker," and finally foreign "intervention" represented by the triumvirate of military, capitalists and papacy. The poster unwittingly charts the successive phases in instrumental use of antireligion for political ends. Anticatholicism only emerges as a dominant discourse in the last phase, at the point at which the Soviet regime had largely eliminated its domestic enemies and was using the threat of foreign intervention to justify continuing coercion.⁵³

[insert fig. 2]

Germany witnessed a dramatic increase in communist anticlerical action in early 1930. The most audacious incursions into church territory in March 1930, such as the interruption of a Berlin church service with shouts of "Red Front!" or the overnight smearing of nearly all of the churches in Krefeld with red paint, were tame by comparison to the events taking place in the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ However, the public assault on the authority of the churches and the sanctity of their symbols was novel and frightening.

Concerned that the "crusade of prayer" would lead to the further persecution, the freshly appointed Secretary of State Pacelli asked Western leaders in February 1930 to assure the Soviets that the Vatican was not engaging in politics. Yet, as Mussolini made clear in his subsequent meeting with the nuncio for Italy, conservatives across Europe had understood the letter precisely as an invitation to launch a political campaign. Mussolini bragged that he had been approached from various quarters to lead the

⁵² *Internationale Presse Korrespondenz*, no. 15, Feb. 11, 1930; N. Bukharin, "La bacchanale commence... ou la déclaration de guerre du pape", *L'Humanité*, April 1, 1930.

⁵³ Peris, *Storming*, 110.

⁵⁴ Brochure of the Inner Mission of Bavaria, April 15, 1930. Archiv des diakonischen Werkes, Berlin, ADW/CA 1814.

charge against Russia. However, because he had already eliminated Marxism in Italy, Mussolini declared that he had nothing to gain by sticking his neck out. "If the [other] powers throw in the ball," he had told the King of Sweden over lunch, "I will be one of the strongest footballers." But as a more straightforward undersecretary of state told the nuncio *sotto voce* before the meeting: "L'Italia non può far niente."⁵⁵

This latter exchange reveals an important aspect of the sharpening of the transnational *Kulturkampf*: it did not effectively change the policies of governments towards the Soviet Union. It was only three years later, when Hitler eliminated Marxist parties and left-wing secularism in the spring of 1933, that the Pope identified Hitler as the first European leader willing to match his own antibolshevik efforts. Nonetheless, by authorizing clerical and lay leaders to give free reign to their anticommunism, the launching of the Pope's "crusade" in February 1930 did have an enormous impact on European politics. In order to study this impact we must leave the level of international diplomacy and delve into the domestic ramifications of this transnational struggle on German church and political life.

The antiseccularist campaign of the German Catholic Church

Episcopal archives contain clippings from the international press, secret German government reports, and voluminous correspondence with experts that indicate that the German bishops were well apprised of the escalating antireligious violence in Russia. They were certainly eager to relay the Pope's message to their local populations. On February 9, the day of the publication of Pope's letter, the leaders of Germany's two Catholic episcopal conferences made headlines by calling for action to halt the godless movement. In a mass in Munich Cardinal Faulhaber decried the "bloody persecution of faith" in Russia, and Cardinal Bertram of Breslau issued a decree warning of the "storm waves of godlessness" released by the "Antichrist" and that were washing over Germany.⁵⁶ Bertram's invocation of the Antichrist was not exceptional in any way.

⁵⁵ Transl. "Italy cannot do anything." ASV, Nunziatura Italia 120, fasc. 10, Russia, fol. 12, Nuncio Borgognini to Pacelli, Feb. 25, 1930.

⁵⁶ "Das russische Elend ohne Gott," *Aus Welt und Kirche*, suppl. to *Bayrischer Kurier*, no. 21, 10.2.1930; U. Kaiser, *Realpolitik oder antibolschewistischer Kreuzzug? Zum Zusammenhang von Rußlandbild und Rußlandpolitik der deutschen Zentrumsparlei 1917 - 1933* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2005), 190–191.

Joseph Gorbach, an Austrian priest in charge of the regional social welfare organization Caritas, used the image of a red serpent twisted around the cross to adorn his brochure *Russland*. [see figure 1] It is difficult to imagine a more drastic biblical repertoire than the one mobilized by the Catholic clergy at that time. Some priests began to directly challenge German government policy towards Russia. Friedrich Muckermann asked provocatively in 1931: "Why don't we storm the cabinets and make clear that besides trade relations there is also the eternal star of Western culture! Christendom [and] the believers in god of the whole world have the holy obligation to protest to the states in order to save humanity from a new Neronic age."⁵⁷ In the spring of 1930 Catholic organizations throughout Germany held large protest meetings against godlessness and appealed for action from the federal government. In Munich, and most likely elsewhere, apparently spontaneous demonstrations of public support for the Pope's initiative were in fact carefully coordinated with the bishops.⁵⁸

In the summer of 1930, the church laid out a more systematic strategy for combatting Russian Bolshevism and German Freethought at its annual episcopal conferences in Freising and in Fulda.⁵⁹ The bishops entrusted the main responsibility for combating atheism to the People's Association for Catholic Germany (Volksverein für das Katholische Deutschland). Founded in 1890 to "defend the Christian order of society," the Volksverein was the lodestar of the universe of Catholic lay organizations. Under the energetic leadership of priest Konrad Algermissen, its apologetic department expanded greatly and developed a comprehensive strategy of trainings, public demonstrations and lectures. Between January 1930 and August 1931 it held 1,737 meetings against radicalism and conducted 76 conferences for priests on Freethought. In some dioceses 90% of the clergy were trained. The Volksverein published a range of works on freethought and related topics, from scholarly investigations to popular penny brochures. In September 1931, Catholic clergy were sent 22,000 copies of *The Church in Struggle and Victory against the Godless Movement of Today*, and the brochure

⁵⁷ "Die Tyrannen im Kreml," *Neues Wiener Journal*, April 20, 1931.

⁵⁸ See correspondence in Faulhaber Archive, no. 2015.

⁵⁹ Kaiser, *Realpolitik*, 208.

God or Demons reached an edition of 1.2 million by 1931.⁶⁰ In a series of letters trying to curry papal support for his activities, Algermissen described to d'Herbigny his method of penetrating large urban centers of German Catholicism. In Dortmund, for example, he invited the chairmen of 600 Catholic lay associations to come to a preparatory meeting in early 1932, for which the Bishop of Paderborn issued a pastoral letter of support. On the first Sunday of Lent, all priests gave sermons on "Bolshevism" and the associations held 18 demonstrations across the city with high attendance.⁶¹

To provide them with further information about the Godless, the German bishops created new offices to which they appointed priests who had developed an interest in Russia as a result of experiences as military chaplains during the First World War. Bertram appointed Ludwig Berg to oversee the community of émigré Russians in Berlin and Faulhaber relied on Erhard Schlund, OSB, to head his Consilium a vigilatia. Reports from the semiclandestine trips that these men undertook to Russia in 1929 and 1931 were circulated to the German government and the Vatican.

These professional apologists took a proactive role in bringing German Catholics in the transnational struggle, as letters from Algermissen to Faulhaber illustrate. When the Mexican government's anticlericalism led to the Cristero insurrection in late 1927, Algermissen led a mission to the visiting Bishop Gonzales of Durango to negotiate Volksverein help for Mexican Catholics. He sought Faulhaber's approval for a broad propaganda and fundraising campaign for the Mexican church and offered his opinion that support for the violence of the Cristeros against the government was legitimate.⁶² In September 1931 Algermissen again sought Faulhaber's assistance. He noted the vigorous campaign that the Volksverein was coordinating with Cardinal Bertram in Prussia and the other Northern German states and sought similar support in Bavaria. Shortly after receiving this request, Faulhaber issued a pastoral letter with directions that it be read from all church pulpits on October 4, 1931. The letter updated the universal prayer: "deliver us, merciful Father, from unemployment and hunger! ... Into your wounds, crucified Christ, we lay our dire worries about the existence of our

⁶⁰ H. Gottwald, "Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland," in *Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte. Die bürgerlichen und kleinbürgerlichen Parteien und Verbände in Deutschland (1789-1945)* (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1986), 460.

⁶¹ AA.EE.SS., Russia, scatola 6, fasc. 44, fol. 94, Algermissen to d'Herbigny, April 7, 1932

⁶² Algermissen to Faulhaber, Sept. 10, 1931, Faulhaber Archive, no. 7088/1, unpag.

Christian religion in our fatherland. The Godless are at work to blasphemy your name, eliminate your commandments, persecute your church, destroy the peace of the nations." It also contained a directive to the Bavarian clergy and laity to shift from "unfruitful lamentations over the godlessness of the godless to positive defense." Faulhaber called on them to reawaken the Volksverein in Bavaria and found new chapters in the spirit of Ludwig Windthorst, the great nineteenth-century leader of the Center Party and founder of the Volksverein.⁶³

The effectiveness of church efforts is reflected in the conclusion reached in February 1933 by the Bishop of Bamberg that "today there can be no faithful Catholic who does not recognize the threat of godlessness and has not joined the battle ranks of Catholic Action."⁶⁴ In other words, after three years of a well planned campaign that used pulpits and newspapers, popular meetings and even radio broadcasts, the church's antibolshevik and antiseccularist message had reached every practicing Catholic.

Political impact of transnational struggles

The ultimate victims of interwar *Kulturkampf* in Germany were not the ostensible targets--the KPD or the Catholic Church--but rather the Social Democratic and Catholic Center Parties. The two parties repeatedly formed national cabinets and, until 1932, jointly governed Germany's largest state, Prussia. This cooperation formed a bulwark against authoritarian solutions to Germany's political and cultural crises, but it was particularly vulnerable to religious politics. On school policy, for example, the parties often had to agree to disagree. The Center Party was never able to pass a school law that protected de facto Catholic prerogatives over curriculums and appointments, and the SPD, for its part, was only able to push through secularizing legislation in individual

⁶³ Amtsblatt der Erzdiözese München und Freising, no. 15, Sept. 21, 1931, Faulhaber Archive, no. 7088/1, unpag.

⁶⁴ From a response to the query initiated by Cardinal Pacelli to determine whether the German bishops considered it opportune for the Holy Office to issue a formal condemnation of Soviet godlessness. The Cardinal Faulhaber gave a more convincing reason for not issuing a declaration: since Hitler was using new emergency powers to crush the Freethinkers and had already imprisoned 2,000 of their leaders, a declaration would be superfluous and would only further stir up Communist anticatholicism. Archivio della Congregazione della Fede, Vatican, R.V. 1933 no. 15 (=1220/1933), S.O. Germaniae - Segr. di Stato.

states.⁶⁵ The reason for this was that religion and worldview were constitutive parts of each party's respective social milieus. The stable years of the Weimar Republic between 1924 and 1929 saw a softening of the "confessional" boundaries that divided Catholic and socialist communities. Carl Sonnenschein, a priest and Volksverein missionary among working-class Berliners, observed signs of the replacement of anticlericalism with growing tolerance and religious pluralism in socialist circles.⁶⁶ The *Kulturkampf* counteracted this process of deconfessionalization.

The crude anticlericalism of the KPD that alienated most of the German population reinforced solidarity within its urban, working-class base. Erich Honecker (1912-1994), the later leader of the GDR, recalled the importance of worldview in his socialization in the Saarland in the late 1920s: "as a young Communist I stood completely on the foundation of the materialistic worldview." Seeking to convert non-communist neighbors, "we discussed as atheists, sometimes with the Protestant boys and girls, sometimes with the Catholics."⁶⁷

The KPD used anticlericalism not merely to rally young communists but to hit the SPD in a vulnerable spot. Cooperation with the Center Party was not popular with many socialists. When the SPD called on its members to vote for Catholic Wilhelm Marx against the conservative Junker Paul von Hindenburg in the presidential elections of 1925, numerous socialist Freethinkers bucked party discipline and voted against Marx.⁶⁸ Precisely in its religious politics, the SPD was vulnerable to the absurd charge that it was cooperating with fascists. As part of his coalition agreements with the Center Party, the socialist governor of the state of Prussia Otto Braun signed a concordat between Prussia and the Holy See in 1929. A cartoon in a communist Freethought newspaper linked this to the Lateran Accords signed with Mussolini the same year. Another cartoon portrayed the Prussian coalition as a worldview hermaphrodite. (See fig. 3)

⁶⁵ K. Ruppert, *Im Dienst am Staat von Weimar: das Zentrum als regierende Partei in der Weimarer Demokratie 1923 - 1930* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992), 287-299.

⁶⁶ C. Sonnenschein, "Wendungen" *Germania* April 5, 1925.

⁶⁷ R. Kaiser and W. Herzberg, *Der Sturz: Erich Honecker im Kreuzverhör*, vol. 4 (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1991), 119-120.

⁶⁸ Kaiser, *Freidenkerverbände*, 148-150.

[insert fig. 3]

The impact of the *Kulturkampf* on the Center Party was a complex one. On the one hand, it stimulated party cohesiveness, by energizing the base and strengthening religious solidarity within the Catholic milieu. A report on Freethought at the Fulda Bishops conference in August 1930 had found that “the boundary between socialist and non-socialist lifestyles appears to be eroding more and more in [confessionally] mixed industrial regions.” The bishops hoped that the struggle against Freethought could help reverse this trend.⁶⁹ In a model sermon against godlessness to be read for the feast of “Christ the King” in October 1931, Volksverein priest Richard Bigenwald foresaw that “just as the *Kulturkampf* once purified and steeled religious life, [...] so the great trials of our day will prove to be a source of blessing for us.”⁷⁰

The struggle against godlessness came on the heels of a major crisis of the Center party spawned by social conflicts around the role of Catholic labor unions and by political conflicts between those on the left, like former chancellor Joseph Wirth, who wanted the party to commit itself to republican government, and more conservative factions, who did not. The election of a priest, Ludwig Kaas, to chairman at the December 1928 party congress helped resolve this crisis, because, as Ulrich von Hehl and Heinz Hürtten have argued, it represented a recognition by party leaders that “in the absence of any other glue [the party] had to orient itself on its common church foundation if it wanted to survive as a political force.”⁷¹ It was, in other words, a victory of Catholic integralism over interest politics. Party intellectuals proudly and

⁶⁹ H. Hürten, *Akten Deutscher Bischöfe über die Lage der Kirche / 1918 - 1933*, vol. 2 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 1067-1074.

⁷⁰ R. Bigenwald, “Predigt zum Christ-König Sonntag: Moderne Gottlosigkeit und katholischer Glaube, Herausgegeben von dem Volksverein,” AA.EE.SS., Germania IV, pos. 585, fasc. 93, fol. 32. The feast of Christ the King had been introduced in 1925 by Pius XI in *Quas Primas* against the “plague of anticlericalism.” Fattorini, 43.

⁷¹ U. von Hehl, “Staatsverständnis und Strategie des politischen Katholizismus in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Die Weimarer Republik 1918-1933: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft*, ed. K. D. Bracher, M. Funke, and H.-A. Jacobson (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1987), 251; H. Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken 1918-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992), 96. On Center politics, see also N. Cary, *The Path to Christian Democracy: German Catholics and the Party System from Windthorst to Adenauer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 121–128.

increasingly announced that among all Weimar parties, Center represented “*the party of worldview*.”⁷²

Antibolshevism reinforced the confessional character of the Center Party, and it provided campaign around which all party factions could come together. As Kaas told Pacelli in 1929, despite his political differences with Joseph Wirth, their joint desire to take action in Russia led Kaas to push through Wirth’s nomination to the new cabinet. Wirth did not disappoint. He repeatedly raised the persecution in Russia in cabinet meetings and, when it came to excoriating the threat of “cultural bolshevism” (*Kulturbolschewismus*) on the floor of the parliament in 1931, his speech and that of Father Georg Schreiber, a more conservative Center MP, fitted hand in glove.⁷³

Yet, even as it papered over political differences between right and left wing factions of the Center Party, the *Kulturkampf* opened up other fronts. It increased Vatican dissatisfaction with German political Catholicism and created an opportunity for intrigue by reactionary Catholics, such as Franz von Papen and Prince Aloys zu Löwenstein, the head Germany’s annual gathering of Catholic organizations (Katholikentag). Unlike conservative Catholics, such as Kaas and Brüning, who sought to work within the existing parliamentary system and thus accepted the necessity of pragmatic coalitions, these “Catholic conservatives,” as historian Larry Eugene Jones

⁷² A leading Center MP Karl-Anton Schulte declared in 1929: “The sole unifying band of all Center Party voters is the ultimate question of all being, which we define with the term worldview.” “Das Zentrum und die neue Zeit: Grundsätze und politischer Ideengehalt der Partei,” in *Nationale Arbeit: das Zentrum und sein Wirken in der deutschen Republik*, ed. Karl-Anton Schulte (Berlin: Andermann, 1929), 31. On Wirth and Schreiber’s speeches, B. Laser, *Kulturbolschewismus!: Zur Diskurssemantik der “totalen Krise” 1929 - 1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2010), 123.

⁷³ In the cabinet meeting of May 22, 1930, Interior Minister Wirth clashed with the Foreign Minister Julius Curtius over Russia. Whereas Curtius argued that tensions were lessening and that a renegotiation of German-Soviet cooperation was opportune, Wirth believed that Soviet internal agitation had become a danger in Germany. To Curtius’s proposal that a new version of the Rapallo agreement prohibit any such interference in domestic politics, Wirth countered that it could not exclude the “free statements of opinion by Christian circles in Germany.” *Akten Der Reichskanzlei / Weimarer Republik*, Kabinette Brüning I u. II, vol. 1 (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1982), 155-158.

has dubbed them, “had deep reservations about the system of parliamentary democracy that Germany had inherited from the November Revolution” and sought “the establishment of a more authoritarian political order.”⁷⁴

Pius XI shared their misgivings about democratic Catholic political parties. In 1923, the Pope forced Luigi Sturzo, the leader of the Partito Popolare Italiano, to stand down and then prohibited his party from aligning itself with socialists to oppose Mussolini.⁷⁵ In May 1925, four weeks after Wilhelm Marx contested the presidential election with SPD backing, the Pope issued a stark warning to the German bishops via the Cardinal Secretary of State, demanding Catholic politicians to examine seriously “in the light of the unfailing principles of the Church whether alliances with socialists, who have always be adversaries of Catholic ideas, denigrating them as reactionary and obscurantist, in the long term do not threaten to become dangers for ecclesiastical authority, which is called upon to watch over social and political Catholic Action.”⁷⁶ In a letter to Pacelli, Marx expressed irritation at being put in the humiliating position of having to justify his party’s policies and blamed “certain aristocratic circles” for poisoning the Pope’s ear. Cardinal Bertram was even more blunt about recent visits to Rome by leading German Catholic conservatives. He wrote Pacelli that “[i]t would be depressing, if interlocutors, who carry no responsibility, are easily believed, and if [...] grumblers, *malcontenti*, and outsiders [English in the original, T. W.] gain an overly warm hearing at the Vatican for their complaints about the episcopate and loyal Catholic politicians.”⁷⁷ In the end, Pacelli and Gasparri accepted Marx’s rationale, but they put the party leadership on notice that such coalitions should not become the norm.

Pius XI denigrated the parliamentary horse-trading of Catholic parties as “la piccola politica.” In its place he proposed “grande politica” built on two pillars: a policy

⁷⁴ L. E. Jones, “Franz von Papen, Catholic Conservatives, and the Establishment of the Third Reich, 1933–1934,” *Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (2011): 275.

⁷⁵ J. Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society, and Politics Since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁷⁶ AA.EE.SS., Stati Eccl., pos 359, fas. 248, fol. 31, Gasparri to Pacelli, May 28, 1925.

⁷⁷ AES, Stati Eccl., pos 359, fas. 248, 1924-51, Cattolici e Socialisti, fol. 73-74, Marx to Pacelli, Dec. 6, 1925; ASV, ANB 92, fasc. 6, Il Centro e il Partito Socialista, fol. 103, Bertram to Pacelli, June 25, 1925.

of concordats to ensure Church influence and security and a campaign to re-Christianize society and usher in the “Kingdom of Christ.”⁷⁸ The agent of this campaign was to be Catholic Action, a lay movement under episcopal supervision that specifically removed the influence of Catholic politicians. Catholic Action was a global movement that revealed national variations. However, the exclusion from it of politicians caused some headaches to Cardinal Faulhaber, when it was decided to introduce Catholic Action in Germany in 1928. In a series of letters to Löwenstein and Pacelli, he wrote that neither the Katholikentag nor the Volksverein could be brought into Catholic Action because of the prominent role played there by Center Party officials. Löwenstein worried that if Catholic Action excluded these politicians, it would become “a competitor to the existing organizations and would then bring division into the Catholic camp rather than the unity sought by the Holy Father.”⁷⁹ In the end, the fears stirred up by the global threat of secularism played a key role in overcoming these worries. Catholic Action was sold to the Germans not as an extension of clerical control of existing organizations, but as a militant response to new threat. In his speech on Catholic Action at the 1928 Katholikentag, Friedrich Muckermann implored his listeners to realize that “everything indicates that we are about to face a worldwide *Kulturkampf*, to which Mexico is but a weak prelude.” He called on them to join the battle front and embrace the coming war and martyrdom for Rex Christi: “Out of the ruins of a chaotically disintegrating epoch rises a giant cross, the cross of the martyrs. But we who die in work and suffering, we greet it with the call of the church, the battle cry of Catholic Action: *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* ... The King’s bright banner forward goes!”⁸⁰ The crucial impact of Catholic Action in German politics was, as historian Klaus Große Kracht has argued, that it created a platform for conservative Catholics outside the Center Party and the parliamentary system.⁸¹

⁷⁸ K. Große Kracht, “Die Stunde der Laien?: Katholische Aktion in Deutschland im europäischen Kontext 1920-1960” (Habilitation, Münster, 2012), 48–50; Y. Chiron, *Pie XI (1857-1939)* (Paris: Perrin, 2004), 196-206.

⁷⁹ Faulhaber to Pacelli, Nov. 22, 1928, Faulhaber Archive, 3602; Faulhaber to Löwenstein, March 20, 1928; Löwenstein to Faulhaber, April 4, 1928, Faulhaber Archive, 6585.

⁸⁰ *Bericht über den Katholikentag 1928* (Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1928), 206, 208.

⁸¹ K. Große Kracht, “Erich Klausener (1885-1934): Preußentum und Katholische Aktion zwischen Weimarer Republik und Drittem Reich,” in *Preußische Katholiken und katholische*

The collapse of Weimar Germany's last coalition government and the formation of the first "presidential" government under the conservative Center party politician Heinrich Brüning in March 1930 encouraged Catholic conservatives in their efforts to permanently replace the Weimar "system" with an authoritarian regime. Antibolshevism and antisecularism proved to be key areas around which the "national opposition" could and did organize, as shown by the example of the German League for the Protection of Western Culture (Bund zum Schutz der Abendländischen Kultur). This pressure group brought together prominent Catholic and Protestant aristocrats (including Papen and Löwenstein and Protestants Baron Wilhelm von Gayl and Werner von Alvensleben) with high-ranking clergymen of both faiths and several former cabinet ministers. The League enjoyed direct connections to President von Hindenburg's entourage and to the strong man of the Reichswehr, General Kurt von Schleicher. It prefigured the "Cabinet of Barons" under Chancellor von Papen that would replace Brüning in June 1932.

The League held a demonstration "for culture and faith against the world revolution" in the Berlin Sportpalast on 16 November 1930, which led to a direct confrontation of antibolshevism and anticlericalism. Among the 8,000 to 9,000 spectators were some 800 members of the KPD, who threw leaflets from the balconies and disturbed throughout.⁸² The presence of leading Center Party politicians in the Bund, including von Papen and Georg Schreiber (later also MP Joseph Joos), rang alarm bells with the Soviet Foreign office. They correctly saw in it an attempt to overturn the Rapallo treaty and bring Germany into an anti-Russian alliance. Papen had already taken part in meetings with French conservatives aimed at promoting French-German rapprochement based on the common threat of Bolshevism to Christian civilization.⁸³ In January 1930, he called on France to join Germany or it would find itself "standing

Preußen im 20. Jahrhundert, ed. R. Faber and U. Puschner (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 279.

⁸² *Der Montag*, no. 44, Nov. 17, 1930; *Die Welt am Abend*, no 269, Nov. 17, 1930.

⁸³ G. Müller, *Europäische Gesellschaftsbeziehungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg; das Deutsch-Französische Studienkomitee und der Europäische Kulturbund* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 81–304.

before the ruins of a fully godless, spiritless, Bolshevized Europe.”⁸⁴ The Bund developed close ties to Swiss-based Entente Internationale Contre la Troisième Internationale. Led by the Protestant Swiss lawyer Théodore Aubert and the Russian Orthodox physician Georges Lodyginsky, this organization had been building up an international and ecumenical network of Christian conservatives since its foundation in 1924.⁸⁵ Although the Vatican similarly argued that Christianity was the true foundation of Western Civilization and supported French-German reconciliation, it steadfastly refused to support ecumenical efforts such as the League or the Entente Internationale.⁸⁶

Although the Brüning cabinet took Germany further down the road of towards authoritarian rule, its commitment to liberal civic rights meant that it could only curb the excesses of anticlerical agitation but not eliminate secularism outright. In a December 1931, the Archbishop of Breslau wrote to Chancellor Brüning of his concern that “the same government that has shown a strong hand in the use of bureaucratic means to protect state authority has not proven strong enough against the godless movement in the eyes of the best circles of the Catholic population. Mistrust is growing in these circles to a worrying degree.”⁸⁷

The manner in which the logic of the *Kulturkampf* worked against the Center Party and ultimately against the Brüning government is shown by the May 1932 decree

⁸⁴ Franz von Papen, “La bonne ou la mauvaise Allemagne?” *Der Ring*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Jan. 12, 1930), pp. 23-24.

⁸⁵ S. Roulin, *Un credo anticommuniste; la commission Pro Deo de l'Entente internationale anticommuniste, ou la dimension religieuse d'un combat politique: 1924 - 1945* (Lausanne: Ed. Antipodes, 2010). On other international organizations, Chenaux, 50-56.

⁸⁶ AA.EE.SS., Russia, Scatola 6, fasc. 44, fol. 94, fol. 22. E. Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne du XIXe au XXe siècle. Itinéraires européens d'expression française* (Paris : Le Centurion, 1982).

⁸⁷ Bertram to Brüning, Dec. 24, 1931, Bundesarchiv R 43II/149, pp. 19-21. Two weeks earlier Cardinal Faulhaber had sought the Pope's blessing for “the greatest task we face in the new year: the defense against Bolshevism,” and complained that the German government was opening the door to atheism by allowing Moscow's agents to operate in all German cities. Faulhaber to Pius XI, Dec. 15, 1931, in: L. Volk, ed., *Akten Kardinal Michael von Faulhabers 1917 - 1945*, vol. I: 599-600.

outlawing the Communist Freethinkers. Because it spared the socialist Freethinkers, the reactionary parties in the Reichstag immediately held this up as proof of collusion between SPD, Center, and the Brüning government. Leading church figures joined in the chorus of complaint. Algermissen faulted Brüning for half-measures, and Nuncio Cesare Orsenigo wrote to Pacelli that because the decree did not ban the socialist freethinkers “it has not gained the complete support of the Catholics and in reality it does not merit special recognition.” For Orsenigo this failure revealed more than the errant coalition policy of the Center party; it revealed the weakness of the liberal state, where “the unlimited freedom of association guaranteed by the constitution of Weimar, also in the field of antireligion, significantly hems [the government’s ability to take] repressive action.”⁸⁸

Mainstream Catholic politicians found themselves in a quandary and were demoralized by the charge that their struggle against godlessness in the public sphere was hypocritical because they continued to uphold the freedom to agitate enjoyed by the socialist freethinkers. Some Catholic conservatives, most notably von Papen, parted ways with Center and sought authoritarian solutions with the anticatholic German National People’s Party and later with the National Socialists. Hitler promised to reverse the secularization pushed through in the early Weimar-era by socialist state governments and to destroy the organizations of secularism in Germany. Both of these aims were accomplished in the first months of the “Third Reich” to the satisfaction of the German churches and the Vatican. In a February 1934 sermon aimed at reminding the Nazis of their obligations in the concordat signed the previous summer, Cardinal Faulhaber stated that the Pope had fulfilled his part of the bargain when he “placed the moral powers of the church at the disposal of the Führer of the German Reich for his struggle against godlessness and immorality.”⁸⁹

Conclusion

While the antireligious violence of the early Soviet Union may have been the most decisive factor in the opening of religious fronts in the latent civil wars that characterized interwar Europe, the German case reveals how national contexts inflected transnational dynamics. Like all increasingly Stalinized communist parties, the

⁸⁸ AA.EE.SS., Germania IV, pos. 585, fasc. 93, fol. 47-48, Orsenigo to Pacelli, May 7, 1932.

⁸⁹ Sermon in Munich, Feb. 18, 1934, in *Akten Faulhabers* I: 853–54.

KPD loyally adopted anticlericalism as a campaign generated in the Soviet center and exported via the Comintern. Yet, this campaign also suited the particular interest of the German communists in their competition with Social Democracy. The KPD hoped to pry disgruntled Freethinkers away from the SPD by portraying its coalition with the Center Party as proof that the socialists were lackeys of clerical fascism.

The dual threat of international and domestic godlessness placed domestic developments in a new light for religiously inspired public figures in Germany. In a speech prepared for a gathering of German Catholics in February 1930, Prince zu Löwenstein wrote that events in Russia showed “us finer nations of the West (*Abendland*), the horrendous possibilities lying in wait at the end of the development, into which we have slid with so much superior tolerance.” This spurred his efforts to revise the postwar liberal order with allies in Germany and elsewhere.⁹⁰ Löwenstein is typical of the German Catholic leaders, who willingly joined the ranks of an imagined Christian army, but not as mere agents of a crusade developed in Rome. In the international struggle, they pursued their own interests, mobilizing old ideals and arriving at new strategies. Similar to the KPD, many conservative Christians--Protestant and Catholic alike--targeted the coalition of the SPD and Catholic Center Party, as an unnatural alliance that prevented a solution to the religious crisis. They argued that the liberal state itself was failing the churches in their hour of need. In this way the “culture war” further destabilized the republic. It added a religious vocabulary to a semantic landscape that was well suited to National Socialist efforts to reach a Christian population otherwise mistrustful of its anticlerical elements.

Comparative cases are needed to test the hypothesis floated at the beginning of this essay that the interwar period was characterized by a transnational *Kulturkampf*. What political role was played by the national and international networks of conservative Christians that organized around antisecularism, such as the League for the Protection of Western Culture and the Entente internationale anticommuniste? Did they too, facilitate Christian collaboration with fascism? The history of political ideas should investigate Christian apology as a crucible in which a number of religious-social discourses and theological-political strategies were forged. Although most succumbed

⁹⁰ “Papst Pius XI. und die Katholische Aktion,” no date, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Abt. Staatsarchiv Wertheim, R-Lit. D Nr. 711.

to the more powerful political ideologies and are now largely forgotten, these Christian strategies and discourses represent signature elements of the political culture of the period. The German case suggests that anticlericalism was a key arena for socialist, communist, and social-emancipatory movements of the interwar period. This should be investigated across Europe and, indeed, globally. Animated by anticolonialism and the promise of rapid modernization, communist movements often targeted missionaries and traditional religions as enemies.⁹¹ Thus, most likely, “culture wars” played a larger role in the global history of the twentieth century than has been hitherto recognized.

Captions for images

Fig. 1. A communist and a Catholic brochure from 1930. Left: Peter Maslowski, *Kulturschande über Deutschland* (Berlin: Verlagsanstalt der proletarischen Freidenker, 1930). Right: Josef Gorbach, *Russland: Bolschewistische Religionsgruel* (Feldkirch: Caritasverlag, 1930).

Fig. 2. Covers from the monthly journal *Bezbozknik* (Godless), published by the League of the Militant Godless. Left: April 1931, caption: “Easter egg and its content.” The eggs are labeled “XB = Christ is resurrected,” “Kulak,” “Subkulak,” “Wrecker,” “Intervention.” Right: cover from September 1931.

Fig. 3. Two depictions of the SPD-Center coalition in Prussia by Communist freethinkers. Left: “We will not leave you, if you bless us!” under the headline article “Concordat = Fascism” *Der Gottlose*, vol. 2, no. 3, March 1929. Right: “A jigsaw”: as a hermaphrodite. *Der Gottlose*, April 1929.

⁹¹ P. van der Veer, “Smash Temples, Burn Books: Comparing Secularist Projects in India and China,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. C. Calhoun, J. VanAntwerpen, and M. Juergensmeyer (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 270–81.